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Comments: According to the Forest Planning rule, a Species of Conservation Concern is defined as [ldquo]a species, other than federally recognized threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species, that is known to occur in the plan area and for which the regional forester has determined that the best available scientific information indicates substantial concern about the species[rsquo] capability to persist over the long-term in the plan area.[rdquo] 36 C.F.R. [sect] 219.9(c).

The Custer Gallatin identifies bison only as a Species of Interest, which is not defined in the Forest Planning rule, and is therefore a pointless designation. The Forest Planning rule requires the Custer Gallatin to document "in the report how the best available information was used to inform the assessment.[rdquo] 36 C.F.R [sect] 219.6.

My family and the Buffalo Field Campaign is asking the Custer Gallatin National Forest to review the best available scientific information to place native wild buffalo on the list of potential Species of Conservation Concern. For example, the International Union for Conservation of Nature lists bison as near threatened. Scientists consider bison ecologically extinct in their original range and estimate the wildlife species occupies less than 1% of their original habitat (Freese 2007; Sanderson 2008). The Montana Heritage Program and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks lists bison as a species of concern [ndash] a native Montana species considered to be [lsquo]at risk[rsquo] due to declining population trends, threats to their habitat and or restricted distribution.

It is imperative that the Custer Gallatin Forest Plan revision include bison on the potential list of Species of Conservation Concern to be decided by the Regional Forester. Without the agency's evaluation of the best available science supporting bison being on the list, the Regional Forester will have no assessment to decide the matter!